

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Wednesday, 21st January, 2009 at 6.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2 at the
Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Boleyn (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Hill, Islam, J Martin, Ms Partridge, Mrs Rogers, Stanley and
Vickers ; Mr Jones, Mrs Roe, Mr Smith, Mr Taylor and Mrs Verdegem

OFFICERS

Director of Finance (Lead Officer to the Committee), the Interim Director of
Children's Services, the Assistant Directors of Children's Services (Children's
Specialist Services) and (Performance and Partnership), the Interim Assistant
Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services)
and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

46

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of
Councillors Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Hanif and Wright; Mrs Cunneen, Mrs
Simms and Reverend Wickens.

47

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member declared a personal or prejudicial interest, in accordance with the
members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter to be considered at this
meeting.

48

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13th
November 2008 and at the Special Meeting held on 25th November,
2008 be approved as correct records and signed.

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor J Martin was serving in place of Councillor Hanif and Councillor Vickers for Councillor Wright for this meeting of the Committee only.

REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2009/10

A joint report of the Interim Director of Children's Services and Director of Finance was submitted seeking consideration of the proposed revenue budget strategy of the Council for 2009/10 and the medium term financial strategy for the period from 2009/10 to 2011/12.

In presenting the report, the Lead Officer to the Committee, in his capacity as Director of Finance, discussed the implications of the Council's overall budgetary position with particular reference to the areas within the terms of reference of this Committee and drew attention to the areas of service under particular pressure. In so doing, he reported the request of the Cabinet that, should a Committee disagree with the level of budget proposed, it should then identify the budget heads from which it considered equivalent savings could be made.

A question and answer session followed in which the Director of Finance summarised the latest position with regard to single status and equal pay and outlined the actions taken to mitigate the possible impact. A number of questions were asked in relation to the savings proposed in the area of Looked After Children, in response to which the Interim Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Specialist Services) explained the actions being taken in conjunction with the Council's partners in relation to residential care both inside and outside the Borough and with regard to the enhancement of support to families. With regard to the provision of safe services for children, in the light of the Baby P case, the Director of Finance affirmed that, in drafting the report, officers had been cognisant of the implications of the possible need for additional resources to be allocated to safeguarding, with paragraph 27(f) of the report covering the point.

On the issue of the budget generally, the Lead Officer to the Committee, as Director of Finance, explained the background to the structuring of the budget, in the light of the level of the council tax that would be proposed and the capping arrangements imposed by Government, and clarified the principles of Area Board Grants.

RESOLVED

That no issues arising from the budget proposals for this Committee be referred to the Cabinet but that the report and the comments made, as recorded above, be noted.

51

BRIEFING ON BABY P CASE IN HARINGEY

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted providing a briefing on the implications for the Council of the Baby P case.

The report set out the action taken by the Government, including the announcement of a national child protection review under the chairmanship of Lord Laming and, in reporting on the particular measures ordered in respect of Haringey, indicated the key issues and key findings from the joint area review carried out into that authority which were relevant for all local authorities to consider. The report also indicated that, in his initial response, Lord Laming had considered there to be no need to change the legislative base of child protection.

The report indicated the action taken locally further to the ministerial announcement and Lord Laming's initial response, together with the perceived implications and context for the Council. The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Specialist Services) then reported orally on actions taken since the submission of the report, which included inter-agency briefings, briefings to the Children's Trust, briefings to head teachers and chairs of governors and consideration of the issue by the Council's Corporate Board of chief officers. Accountability and responsibility issues were being reviewed and a report would be made to the Committee on the outcome at the March meeting.

In the question and answer session that followed the presentation of the report, the current position regarding social worker staffing and recruitment was indicated by the Assistant Director. In response to a question on whether there were particular areas where members of the Council could play a role, the Assistant Director indicated that consideration was being given to the development of community involvement issues and that she would be happy to engage members on a community approach. She also referred to the inclusion of Lay Members on the Safeguarding Board. The manner in which child protection co-ordination was undertaken in schools was also outlined.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the content of the report be noted and that the actions described, as set out in the report and as recorded above, be endorsed.
 - (2) That a further report be submitted to the Committee following the internal review of Safeguarding arrangements.
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ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2008

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee of the outcome of the Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services for Dudley for 2008.

Judgements were based on a four point scale with the number 4 being outstanding and number 1 being inadequate. Dudley's services had been judged to be good (number 3) in all respects. It was pointed out in the report that the Assessment was not purely an evaluation of services provided by the Local Authority but also provided an insight into how effectively the Council was collaborating with its partners within the Children's Trust to improve outcomes for children and young people.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

RESPECT YOURSELF CAMPAIGN – CURRENT ACTIVITY

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted, providing an update on the work and progress of the Respect Yourself Campaign in respect of teenage pregnancy.

The report, which provided key data in some detail, indicated that, in Dudley, there had been an 11.1% reduction in teenage conceptions between 1998 and 2006, although the rate had increased slightly in 2006. There had been an overall rate of decline in the Borough since 1998.

The report also indicated the consultation arrangements that had been applied locally and gave examples of work undertaken under the campaign.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF THE DUDLEY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRUST

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted summarising the background to, and the work of, the Children and Young People's Trust in Dudley.

The constitution of the Board had been approved and the approved constitution was appended to the report now submitted. The report also included reference to the composition of the Board, the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework and its activity to support vulnerable young people, partnership working, the review of the Children's Trust in Dudley by the Audit Commission in June, 2008 and statutory guidance on Children's Trusts published recently by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

In relation to a request made for members of the Council to join the Trust Board, the Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that a letter inviting the political groups to nominate had been sent and that responses were awaited.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

55 DUDLEY HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL SERVICES – PROGRESS REPORT

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services on progress on the Health Promoting Schools Service for the period from April to December, 2008 was submitted.

The report summarised the support offered by this partnership service to all schools, pupil referral units and alternative providers in the Borough, together with key outcomes.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

56 THE PROGRESS OF DUDLEY SCHOOLS AS MEASURED BY OFSTED INSPECTION

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted indicating the outcome of OFSTED inspections in Dudley schools over the period from September 2005 to December 2008.

In noting that, currently, Dudley had no schools deemed to require a Notice to Improve or to be in need of Special Measures, the report summarised judgements made by OFSTED on the Borough's schools over the period by the different inspection regimes. The priorities for the Directorate of Children's Services for 2009/10 in the area of school improvement were set out in the report.

Reference was made in the discussion to the involvement of Dudley in a pilot project on a new inspection framework, which OFSTED were proposing to implement nationally. The Interim Director of Children's Services indicated that, under the pilot, schools were to be judged against a higher criteria than hitherto.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

57

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of the Select Committee on Children's Services for the second quarter of 2008/09 was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

58

MR MIKE WILLIAMS

This being the last meeting of the Committee that Mr Williams would be attending in his capacity as Lead Officer to the Committee, in view of his impending retirement from the service of the Council, the Chairman and members of the Committee thanked him for his outstanding service to the Committee and to the Council overall.

The meeting ended at 7.35 pm

CHAIRMAN